ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

June 1994

Wellness Center to Focus on Health Concerns at UFMCC Leadership Conference

Dr. Beverly Deal

Both women's and men's health issues will be featured in the *Wellness Center*, at the 1994 UFMCC Leadership Conference, scheduled in Dallas, Texas, August 2-4. Dr. Beverly Deal, a psychotherapist, will be the coordinator of the Wellness Center. Dr. Deal says, "I want the Wellness Center to be a supportive place where people with catastrophic illnesses can go and make connections with others in similar situations." The Center will be a comfortable room where light refreshments and a place to rest will be available. "This way, people won't have to return to their hotels if they need to rest during the conference," Dr. Deal states.

During the conference, there will be daily support groups as well. Rev. Dr. Lori Dick will run a support group for women, focusing on women's health issues. Rev. Steve Pieters will offer a support group for persons living with HIV/AIDS. Rev. Jim Mitulski will facilitate a group for men who are HIV-negative.

Rev. Dick, a doctor of Osteopathic Medicine and Associate Pastor of MCC Los Angeles, has been gathering information about early testing and treatment of breast cancer. But she also hopes that women with other health issues will participate. "I want to explore

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Sarasota's MCC Builds Columbarium

Soon after becoming Pastor of Church of the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, FL, Rev. T. Edward Helms noticed a small garden area in the southeast corner of the property. After some inquiries, he discovered that the area had been used to scatter ashes of deceased members and friends. The only remains scattered there, known to the church, are the ashes of the son of Icie Bray. Once the matter was clear to the Pastor, he declared that the area was now sacred ground, and should be preserved as such. This was the beginning of a new part of the vision for the church, a vision that was formalized by the congregation at a meeting held April 17, 1994. At that meeting, the congregation approved the plans to construct a Columbarium and Prayer Gardens on the site that had heretofore been marked only by the memories of one mother.

"This will be the first project of its kind in UFMCC," said Rev. Helms. "MCC of the Rockies, MCC Washington, DC, and King of Peace MCC all have columbarium walls inside their buildings or memory gardens on property, but nothing exists of this magnitude. This is the closest thing to a church cemetery that we can legally have. I felt very strongly the need to have sacred ground to memorialize the lives of those we have loved who have gone on to be with God."

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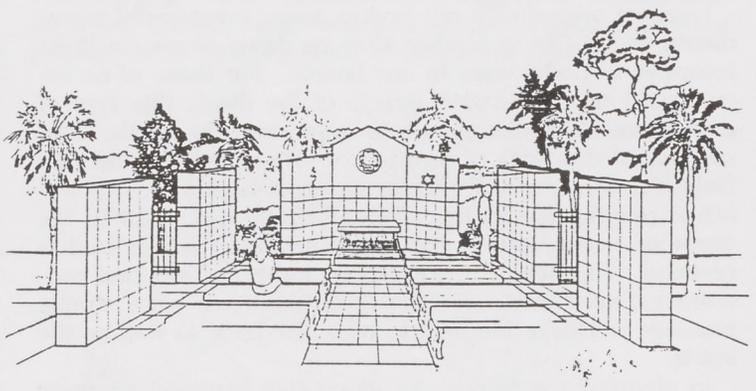

Sketch of the Columbarium

"Listening To The Voice Within:" HIV and Spirituality Retreat At MCC/SF

By Rev. Jim Mitulski, Pastor of MCC San Francisco

As we continue to live in the midst of HIV, we discover the need to create new programs to keep pace with the unexpected demands of the epidemic. MCC San Francisco hosted its first HIV and Spirituality Retreat the first weekend in May. The retreat was conceived as a 24-hour experience in which people living with HIV could deepen their spiritual resources, and increase energy by taking time away from the intesity of life in the Castro.

The retreat theme was based on I Kings 19, the story of Elijah in the wilderness. Elijah could not find God in the bustle and activity of the earthquake, wind and fire, but was able to discern the divine presence in the still, small voice of God in the wilderness. We, too, found that HIV and all that it demands of us can be an impediment to our spiritual life, but if we take time to listen for the still, small voice, we can also experience God's faithfulness. The retreat organizers encouraged participants to slow down, take plenty of quiet time, and tap into the interior resources that cannot be controlled by the FDA.

The pastoral setting of the Mercy Center, a Catholic convent in a nearby suburb, enhanced the atmosphere of quiet reflection. The retreat began with our participation in the Taize Candlelight prayer service hosted monthly in the convent chapel. We joined several hundred other spiritual seekers in singing and praying in the near darkness for almost two hours. The starkness of the chapel contrasted with the richness of the voices, resulting in a mystical experience for everyone.

Throughout the next day we gathered as a group for guided exercises which emphasized the theme of "Listening to the voice within." At one session we listened to recordings of Vietnamese poet Thich Nhat Hanh, who predicted that the next divine incarnation, the Buddha of Love, will be born in a cradle fashioned of the suffering of the Vietnamese people, and would be perhaps not a person but a whole community. We compared the levels of suffering in our own lives as a result of HIV, and found solace in the hope that in the midst of sickness and death God is fashioning a redemptive community, our own "Buddha of Love."

Later we prayed with our bodies, using the graceful movements of Tai Chi to further slow us down so we could be receptive to God's voice in our hearts. For those of us accustomed to the frenzied energy of the disco, this type of dance motion challenged us to appreciate the gentle, fluid motions of this style of meditation. We ended the day with Holy Communion and the laying-on-of-hands for one another, praying for healing of mind, body and spirit in the name of Jesus, and in the many names of which God is revealed. Throughout the weekend, individual pastoral conferences were available by appointment, as were simple massage sessions designed to relax the body as well as the spirit.

In planning the retreat, we found that logistical planning was a priority. Depending on individual health situations, even short trips can pose a challenge to people with HIV. The majority of the participants suffer from severe and chronic diarrhea, so proximity to pleasant bathrooms was a frequently cited concern. The Mercy Center provided a warm, comfortable indoor environment with the outdoor option for those who were up to availing themselves of it. Plenty of free time for naps or rest was built in so that everyone could participate without feeling left out.

Private donations ensured that finances were not a barrier to participation for anyone who wanted to go; of the 17 attending, all but two were retired from working. The retreat was led by MCC/SF pastor Rev. Jim Mitulski, MCC/SF HIV Program director Rev. Alan Eddington, and MCC/SF deacon Dr. Patrick Horay. The retreat was celebrated in church the next day as another dimension of MCC/SF's creed, that spirituality is as diverse as sexuality and can empower us to live hopefully and powerfully in the midst of HIV, as we continue to listen for the voice of the divine within us all, "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased."

(Mark 1:11) ▼

Wellness Center...

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with the group the psychological dimensions of mind/body prevention and healing. Women who may be well, but have fears or anxiety about breast cancer or any other health issues are welcome to join the support group."

Rev. Pieters, Field Director of UFMCC AIDS Ministry and a long-term survivor of AIDS, hopes the HIV/AIDS support group will offer the kind of support that these groups have offered at General Conferences. "It always helps to connect with others who are dealing with the same issues you are. For some of the Fellowship leadership, these support groups, away from their local church, are the first time they've been able to openly share their feelings, let alone their HIV status."

Rev. Mitulski, the pastor of MCC San Francisco, has been running HIV-negative groups for quite some time in his local church. "The purpose is to provide support and to reinforce safer sex behaviors in men who are HIV-negative. They've been very successful at MCC San Francisco. My goal at the Leadership Conference is to model a program which people can use in their own church, as well as to provide support for the issues around being HIV-negative, and of course, to reinforce safe behaviors."

Dr. Deal, who received her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at San Francisco, is a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Counselor, in practice in Southern California since 1984. Her specialty is sex therapy, counseling and education. As a founding member of the Orange County AIDS Ministry Ecumenical Network, she has had a great deal of experience with persons living with HIV/AIDS. Dr. Deal is a member of Sunrise MCC of the Hi Desert in Lancaster, CA.

The site for this year's Leadership Conference will be the beautiful new Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas. For further information on the conference, contact the UFMCC at 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029; phone 213/464-5100. ▼

CDC Documents Delivery Available in U.S.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control National AIDS Clearinghouse has announced a new program, Document Delivery Service. For the last five years, the Clearinghouse has been a source for CDC-approved materials. The new document delivery service will give access to additional scientific, educational, and other HIV/AIDS-related materials.

Through the Document Delivery Service, you can:

* Order photocopies of materials from the Clearinghouse's Educational Materials Database (you will not need to contact several publishers to order the items you want;)
* See copies of entire documents so you do not have to depend on abstracts to select items for particular audiences
* Get copies of materials that are no longer available from the original publishers.

The cost is $5.00 per document up to two pages, and $.05 per page for each additional page in the document.

Items available from the Document Delivery Service include:

* Training manuals to help prepare and present HIV/AIDS information to different audiences
* Brochures and educational materials for the general public and selected target populations
* Fact sheets, reports, information packages, wallet cards, and other resources for education and prevention programs.

For further information on the Document Delivery Service call a Reference Specialist at 800/458-5231. ▼

Sarasota Builds Columbarium

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The plans include an "open air chapel" with columbarium monuments serving as walls. In each place where a window would be in the chapel, there will be an iron gate leading to formal gardens on either side. The main wall beyond the altar is designed in three sections. The center section will hold a stained glass MCC cross (actually construction glass will be used), the east wall will have a gold leaf Star of David, and the west wall will hold a flaming Chalice, the Unitarian symbol. "I chose the Star and Chalice symbols to bring an interfaith theme to the Chapel area. Our people are so diverse, and yet so united in their belief that God is guiding our every step to freedom," said Rev. Helms. "This is our gift to the whole community. Everyone is encouraged to be a part of this lasting memorial of gay and lesbian faith in God."

The Chapel site will have niches for ashes, ranging in price from $500 up to $1500. There are also religious symbols and granite benches available as memorials. In the Prayer Gardens, each area will be bordered off in one foot squares with a small standing brass or granite plaque denoting the person remembered in the center of the space. A Trust Fund for Perpetual Care is established with part of the proceeds to insure its lasting care and beauty.

"This project is completely self-funding," said Rev. Helms. "Absolutely no general or building funds will be used." The construction will not begin until sufficient spaces have been memorialized and the donation received to cover complete construction cost. The goal is to begin by late summer of 1994. Once constructed there will be "compassionate use" space available for those without friends or family with resources. ▼

Interferon Gamma Boosts Ability to Fight Mycobacterial Infections

Interferon gamma helped fight non-tuberculous mycobacterial infections in patients who did not respond to conventional therapies, according to research reported in the May 12 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* by scientists from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH).

"This research effort adds to our understanding of mycobacterial infections, which have become increasingly important as more and more individuals suffer the immunosuppression of HIV disease," says Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

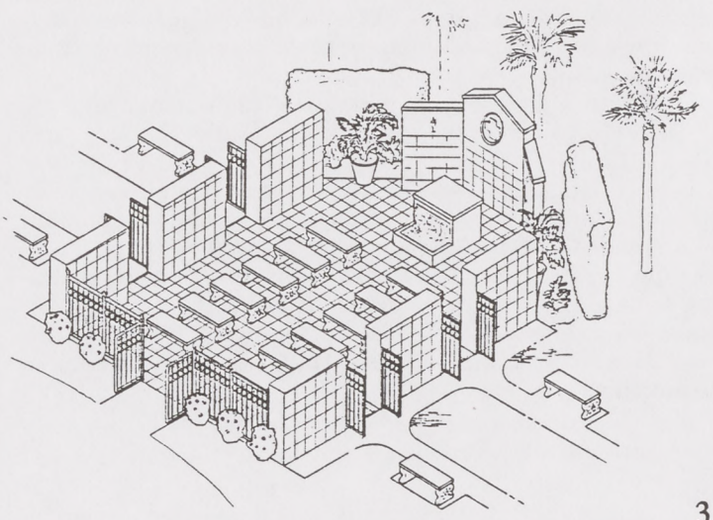
Mycobacteria are a diverse family of disease-causing organisms including some that cause tuberculosis. Non-tuberculous mycobacteria occur in the environment and usually affect only people with impaired immune systems. They can cause serious, often life-threatening diseases such as disseminated *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) which affects up to 40 percent of people infected with HIV.

The study involved seven patients who were not HIV infected and had severe non-tuberculous mycobacterial infection of at least two organ systems. Six of the patients had MAC.

The patients had received the maximum tolerated conventional treatment for at least four months and had become drug-resistant before enrolling in the current study. Treated with interferon gamma, all patients rapidly improved and many of their symptoms abated.

"Laboratory and animal studies have suggested that interferon gamma, a protein normally secreted by the immune system's T cells, plays an important role in containing and clearing mycobacterial infections in the body," says Steven M. Holland, M.D., who reported the study. "We also noted that patients in this study produced smaller amounts of this protein than healthy people. Once we added interferon gamma to their therapy, we saw dramatic improvement with few side effects, which leads us to conclude that the protein may someday be used in the treatment of other mycobacterial infections, including tuberculosis."

NIH associate director for clinical research, John I. Gallin, M.D., states, "These findings have important implications for using interferon gamma and related immune-boosting proteins in the management of infectious diseases." ▼



AID Atlanta Taps MCC For New Pastoral Service Department

R.W. "Chip" Carson, who has been approved for licensing as clergy by the Gulf Lower Atlantic District Clergy Review Committee, serves as the Pastoral Care Coordinator for AID Atlanta and the Atlanta Interfaith AIDS Network. Carson also serves on the staff of First MCC of Atlanta.

AID Atlanta has asked Mr. Carson to develop a Pastoral Service Department to respond to requests from churches contacting the AIDS service agency. It will be a small department set up to augment the work of the Atlanta Interfaith AIDS Network, who work cooperatively with AID Atlanta.

Atlanta Interfaith AIDS Network runs a number of different programs, one of which provides care teams of 6 or 7 people who take care of individual patients. Carson, in his new assignment, will be making patient visits in homes, nursing homes, and hospitals. He has just appointed a Roman Catholic nun, who will be assisting him. He is also setting up a volunteer base to help provide 1,000 visits to patients per month. He is already handling 250 visits per month by himself.

Mr. Chip Carson

Mr. Carson was recently invited to join the Metropolitan Atlanta Chaplain's Association, and on May 18, hosted their monthly luncheon meeting at AID Atlanta. Although there was no set agenda or program, the chaplains asked a great many questions requesting information regarding AIDS. Carson heard a lot of frustration, particularly from chaplains in outlying counties.

Reflecting on his activities, Mr. Carson said, "I am delighted that, as more churches show interest in participating in ministry to people living with AIDS, MCC is an integral part of the response." ▼

Protease Inhibitors: Current Status

(By John S. James, [reprinted with permission from *AIDS Treatment News*, Issue #198, May 6, 1994])

"Protease Inhibitors: Overview and Analysis," by Dave Gilden, with assistance from Ben Cheng, Rick Loftus, and others, which appears in the March 1994 *GMHC Treatment Issues*, uses both published articles and unpublished information from within companies to provide an authoritative status report on the protease inhibitors now in human trials.

This class of potential anti-HIV drugs is perhaps the most important group of experimental treatments at the present time, although the current candidates still face major problems - including the development of resistant strains of HIV, poor oral absorption, and expense and difficulty of manufacture.

The article reviews the drugs of Hoffmann-LaRoche, Merck, Abbot, Searle (Monsanto), Vertex/Burroughs Wellcome, and Agouron; it also names a number of other companies which are developing protease inhibitors that are not yet in human trials.

To obtain a free copy of the March 1994 issue, write to: GMHC, Medical Information, 129 West 20th St., New York, NY 10011.

[*GMHC Treatment Issues* is published 12 times a year; annual subscriptions are available for a suggested donation of $30 individual, $50 physicians and institutions, and $60 foreign; persons with AIDS or HIV can contribute on a sliding scale or obtain a free subscription. You can ask to have your subscription start at the beginning of 1994, and include the special winter 1993/1994 issue on alternative treatments.] ▼

Rev. Gonzalez Leads Latino Memorial Service For Bienestar

Friday evening May 13, Rev. Jose Marcos Gonzalez, Associate Pastor of MCC Los Angeles, and Director of that church's Latin Ministry, led a community memorial service for Latino persons who have died from HIV/AIDS. The service was conducted at Bienestar, a Latino AIDS Service Agency in Los Angeles. Bienestar has contracted with MCC Los Angeles and Rev. Gonzalez to provide pastoral care and support for their clients.

The service was conducted in Spanish, and the room was packed with people. Many persons shared memories of special friends, and lit memorial candles on a beautiful altar, which had been constructed especially for the service. The altar held pictures of many of the clients of Bienestar who have succumbed to the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Representing UFMCC AIDS Ministry at the service, Rev. Steve Pieters observed, "Although I didn't understand much of what was said in the service, Rev. Gonzalez led the service with very impressive style, and I could tell the people took great inspiration from what he said. He facilitated the grieving process, but sent them back into the world with hope. I was very impressed with his presence in the pulpit."

Rev. Gonzalez, whose ministry has been needed for years in a city which has a sizeable Spanish-speaking population, is quickly becoming a highly visible and influential presence in the HIV/AIDS community of Los Angeles. His pastoral presence at Bienestar serves as an excellent outreach from MCC Los Angeles. ▼

ALERT

ALERT is a monthly newsletter containing information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research & Treatment. The Editor is Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters. For more information, or to send a donation, please write to: ALERT, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., #304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.